

first, or basic speech. But there is also a sense of primary speech being God's speech. What is it that God speaks first? What is God's basic speech?

Since prayer involves our response, I want to deal with that last. Let's think a moment about God's speech. What is it that God speaks first? The Black Church has been adamant about that question, at least since the eruption of the Civil Rights Movement, if not from the days of slavery. That speech is rooted in the human quest for freedom. The essential text for comprehending that truth is found in Exodus where God calls Moses and tells him to go to Pharaoh and say, "Let my people go!" When we consider this text, we immediately discover that this God hears and speaks.

God hears! Despite all your swirling circumstances; despite the doubts which dim the sun; the scriptures are clear: God does hear. And God is concerned when people are oppressed. This is what he says to Moses, "I have seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters; I know their sufferings, and I have come to deliver them."

What is it that God speaks first; what is God's primary speech? Within Exodus, God speaks first about human liberation and hope. And this is one of the contributions Black Theology has made in my life: God is not just concerned for me as an individual, though that is true enough. But God is concerned with how I treat my neighbor. And I cannot pretend to love God on Sunday and oppress someone on Monday. God's primary speech is about freedom and responsibility. The freedom to be and the responsibility to allow others the same freedom.

Revealed in this passage is a God who is just and who listens when we cry. But not only that. Revealed as well is a God who sends prophets to look into the face of a tyrant and demand liberation for their people.

As I began to get in touch with the history of slavery in this country and the history of its racism whipped onto the back of this nation, leaving its scarring wounds for generations and generations; as I began to hear and listen to friends tell me what it is like to be, in the words of W. E. B. Du Bois, "a seventh son born with a veil;" as I stand in the chapel at the Howard University School of Divinity, as I did last week, and worship with the students there, many of whom have become my students and friends, and I watch them worship with fervency and with pride and dedication receive the Tradition from their ancestors and thus secure it for another generation and the future; as I did those things, I began to touch another mystery, a theological one. And it is this: how is it that those who have suffered continue to believe in God? This is a mystery of faith shared with the Jewish people. How is it that a people who have been bloodied and run barefoot and naked into rivers to find freedom, how is it that they believe in God, while the educated and the affluent have determined that such belief is untenable? I'll tell you why I think this people have kept kindled the fire of faith and trust in God: it is because of that primary speech called prayer.

The Exodus passage reveals a hearing, speaking God who speaks in the syllables of freedom and liberation. But you'll notice once again from that passage that God said, "I have heard their cry." Those Hebrew slaves were praying. That primal speech was being uttered amongst the mud and straw as they made bricks for Pharaoh. They cried from the hut of being to God and believed that this world could not have come into being without such a God and nor could their liberation occur except he send a liberator. The African-American experience knows this God; knows this contest of slavery. Daniel

Coker in his "Prayers from a Pilgrim's Journal", wrote in 1820. "When will Jehovah hear our cries? When will the sun of freedom rise? When will for us a Moses stand, And bring us out from Pharaoh's hand?"

Perhaps then the question is not how an African-American could still believe in God. The question is, given the utter depravity of slavery and the history of racism, upon whom else would he depend for his liberation and freedom? No one but God.

James Washington has stated his own struggle with this question of how to love and trust God who has the power to free but his people are still enslaved. And he admits that he has doubted. Well, who wouldn't? But he also says he inherited the burden of believing in God. He told the story of how as a young child, in the early morning hours, he was awake looking out his bedroom window in East Tennessee. He lay there counting stars when he heard a voice. He strained to hear. It was his mother's voice. "She was," he wrote, "speaking in a piteous hush. I yearn to recapture her exact words. I cannot. I do know that the drama of the moment demanded that I should stop counting stars. I could not resist the temptation to eavesdrop on a most unusual conversation. Mama said a few words about her burdens, anxieties, children. Then an awesome silence would punctuate her lamentation to ...God? Who was her conversation partner? Daddy was working on the night shift. 'Please, Jesus!' she cried. I felt she was hurt, maybe even dying. I ran to be with her. I rubbed her back while she sobbed.

"In many ways," Washington writes, "I have been in spiritual solidarity with my mother since that moment. She taught me to pray. Her silence and her action taught me that I must pray."

I know. I know in a cynical age; in an age when entire sets of encyclopedias thirty and forty in number can be put on one CD; I know that in an age where we can launch people into space and gaze into the deep, black sea of space; I know that in an age which is utterly materialistic and can conceive of nothing so majestic as a spirit; that in such an age, prayer seems idle and worthless. But we better remember that few great things have been done without it and those events which matter most were most certainly the result of prayer. Think of Gandhi in India. That myriad number of persons who marched and whose names we will never see printed on a page or dramatized in film who prayed in churches and sang their way to freedom in the Civil Rights Movement. Think of those Christians in Eastern Europe who were scheduled by Marx and the children of Marx for destruction but who lived to see the Iron Curtain collapse. Think of those brave souls in South Africa who prayed and didn't give up and have seen apartheid ended and Mandela made the father of a nation. Think of Sojourner Truth who said, "Let others say what they will of the efficacy of Prayer, I believe in it, and I shall pray. Thank God! Yes, I shall always pray."

Today we begin our remembrance of those who preceded us in faith; those whose feet passed over the stony road, who felt the bitter chast'ning rod, those who somehow tread a path through the blood of the slaughtered—we remember them and we lift our voices in thanksgiving for their lives. We pray sorrowfully for those millions lost to the savage ways of this brutal world. Nameless in death, we commend them nonetheless to God who knows them by name. Today we remember and we celebrate their victory, for beloved, the God to whom they prayed for deliverance does deliver and we will march on until victory is won and we will remain true to God and our native land. We shall not be moved from the glorious vision of a table

set in the presence of our enemies where all God's children can sit down together and eat at the table of brother and sister hood. Too many have paid the ultimate price; we have come too far to abandon that vision now.

Here within the primal speech of God addressing us as his own; here in the primal speech of prayer and devotion, may we offer ourselves to God and to each other. Amen.●

RICKY RAY HEMOPHILIA RELIEF ACT OF 1997

● Mr. ABRAHAM. Mr. President, I rise today as a cosponsor of S. 358. This legislation, introduced by Senator DEWINE, will provide compassionate payments to eligible individuals or families of persons with hemophilia-related AIDS.

More than 90 percent of people with severe hemophilia and half of all persons with hemophilia have been infected with HIV. In addition, between 10-20 percent of the spouses, children, and partners of these individuals also have been infected. I believe all of us should support measures that would improve the lives of those who have contracted blood diseases through poorly screened blood supplies.

The Ricky Ray Hemophilia Relief Act of 1997 would provide a payment of \$125,000 to persons with hemophilia-related HIV who used blood products between July 1, 1982 and December 31, 1987. HIV-positive spouses and children of these individuals also are eligible. Based on the 7,200 eligible individuals, the bill would authorize \$900 million to be contributed through a five-year trust fund administered by the Department of Health and Human Services. The "window" of eligibility is based on evidence of HIV transmission to the hemophilia community and the last manufacturer recall of contaminated blood products in 1987. It seems clear to me that both the federal government and private industry should be held accountable for the infection of most of the hemophiliac community during those years.

These people have had tragedy visited upon them through no fault of their own, amply because they depend on a blood supply that, for a time, was not kept safe. I am happy to be able to assure the American people that problems with our blood supply have been addressed and hope my colleagues will join me in providing some small relief to those who are suffering from past failures.●

CONGRATULATIONS TO WISCONSIN'S OLYMPIANS

● Mr. FEINGOLD. Mr. President, today I want to offer my heartiest congratulations to the athletes who represented our nation and the State of Wisconsin so admirably at the recently-completed 18th Winter Olympic Games in Nagano, Japan.

Millions of people throughout the world thrilled to the sights and sounds of athletes, several of whom overcame great personal hardship, pushing themselves to go faster, farther or higher at